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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9806

INFO RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE

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SUBJECT: EMBASSY HOSTS ONE OF DELHI'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS  
IFTARS

11. (SBU) Mission India hosted its Iftar on October 18 in New Delhi. Now an annual event, this Mission Iftar is eagerly awaited by the Muslim community and has become one of the "must attend" Iftar parties during the fasting month of Ramzan. Influential Muslims attended from all over India. Many who were not on the initial guest list, even called to request invitations. Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dixit held her own grand Iftar across town on the same day, competing for many of the same guests, but this did not appear to have cut into attendance, estimated at 145. Some guests attended both events and told us that the Embassy Iftar is viewed within the Muslim community as far more substantive and dignified. This event provides an excellent opportunity for Mission personnel to interact with Muslims from every major sect and many geographic areas. As was the case last year, Muslims from antagonistic sects and factions met on neutral ground to exchange Iftar greetings and discuss current politics. Press coverage has been positive.

12. (SBU) Embassy officers from a variety of sections interacted with Muslim contacts made over the years via Mission-sponsored exchange and outreach programs. The Charge's address stressed Islam's many contributions to India and the world and US willingness to work closely with Muslims to address pressing world problems, as well as shared US/Muslim values, such as family, education, peace and tolerance. Muslim leaders were particularly moved and favorably impressed by the Charge's pledge to work with Muslims on eradicating the threat of polio. Polio has made a resurgence in India, with many experts attributing its resilience to Muslim reluctance to participate in the immunization program. His remarks were well-received by the friendly audience.

¶3. (SBU) CNN-IBN produced a sympathetic TV spot that highlighted the fact that the US Embassy was the only non-Muslim mission to host an Iftar. The spot ran approximately every two hours throughout the day on October ¶19. In addition to a sound bite from the Charge about the long-standing tradition of the USG hosting Iftars and footage of his speech, the story also featured sound bites from a Shia Imam from Lucknow and guests from around India, as well as details of the menu, shots of guests breaking the fast, and footage of the Imam's Qu'ran recitation. The Mission continues to receive letters of thanks from participants, filled with praise for the event. With the Embassy Iftar receiving growing and positive attention from the Muslim community, next year's event promises to be eagerly anticipated.

¶4. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:  
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)  
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